1: Melamid K-4 (no date) 1953 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4
Qatar MK3

Gulf of 'Oman established by the Middle East Anti-Locust Unit in 1943. Besides Trucial sheikhs and their immediate subjects, there are Bedouins, who, however, do not engage in any activity on the seas and are thus outside the provisions of the treaties. In general, the Bedouins recognize the authority of one or another of the Trucial sheikhs, but changes of allegiance are numerous. Bedouins may decide to make wars of their own, or to change sides during wars between Trucial sheikhs, which makes the political position even more complex. In recent years Bedouins have frequently attacked the motor convoys of British nationals traveling in the definite territory of peaceful sheikhs,[10] but under the provisions of the treaties there seems to be no legal remedy to stop this armed aggression, except through successful local wars by the sheikhs.

As a result of the nature of the treaties, the culture of the area, containing both Arab and Iranian elements, has been preserved practically free of any foreign admixture. Dr. A. R. Lindt,[11] a Swiss observer writing in 1939, was particularly impressed by this achievement. Slowly, however, twentieth-century influences have begun to appear. In the early 1930's Great Britain, in the course of a quarrel over oil concessions in Iran, relocated its air routes to India over Trucial 'Oman instead of Iran. Rights to land seaplanes at Dibai and landplanes at Sharjah were acquired, and maintenance crews and other personnel were permanently stationed there. To ensure safety during local wars, overnight quarters for passengers, with permanent armed guards, were established in a fortified compound near Sharjah. Landing fees, levied according to the number of passengers, were payable to the sheikhs in whose territory landings took place. These landing fees constituted a large part of the revenues of the sheikh of Sharjah, whose only other income is derived from a tax on pearling, which is hard to collect.[12] During the war, rights to make emergency landings on the island of Yas were also acquired by the British government. Today, larger planes can fly directly from Bahrein to Karachi, and little use is made of the landing rights on the Trucial Coast, so that the sheikhs' revenues must have decreased substantially. The introduction of the motorcar has also had a marked effect on the local economy. Traffic from inland oases and the Gulf of 'Oman to the cities on the shores of the Persian Gulf is important, though no statistical data are available.

The presence of oil had been suspected since the beginning of the century, but the inaccessibility of the region together with its uncertain political status

[10] O'Shea, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
[11] Politics in the Persian Gulf, *Journ. Royal Central Asian Soc.*, Vol. 26, 1939, pp. 619–633.
[12] O'Shea, *op. cit.*, pp. 76 and 140.

to the majority of professing Christians. If an easy acceptance of poor and insanitary living conditions is one of the major faults of this race, as I believe it is, then such a shortcoming is easily counterbalanced by their innumerable virtues, which are seldom found in practice amongst Englishmen.

I have not had the opportunity to make a deep study of social problems in Arabia, but from my interpretation of what I have seen, I should not hesitate to lay the blame for the vices and backwardness of Arab life on the system of government which obtains in most regions. In principle it is comparable with the feudal system in Europe. Apart from the Bedouin country, where life is migratory and the tribes are tent-dwellers, the majority of Arabs are concentrated in the fertile valleys, where they can obtain water for their livestock and crops. In Oman, as in other parts of the continent, the coastal areas are ruled by paramount sheikhs, whose power is absolute and who are sometimes elected by their subjects, but who are more generally appointed by succession, the kingdom thus remaining in the hands of one family. Although many of these princely families are quite ancient, and have provided rulers for different sheikhdoms for centuries, it is not unusual to find one sheikh deposing another by force. Jealousy and a greed for more territory and power are frequently the root cause of tribal wars.

There is little that is democratic in the government of a sheikhdom. Through his judges and ministers, who are paid out of the royal purse, the sheikh administers justice. Often it is the justice of a tyrant, although some sheikhs are just and kindly and are regarded by their subjects more as 'fathers of the people' than as kings. All land belongs to the sheikh, who is theoretically custodian for his tribe, and he exacts revenues from merchants, shopkeepers, fishermen, pearling-fleet owners and merchants, camel breeders and farmers, in the form of a commission on all business, in addition to heavy taxes on the inhabitants of the towns and villages. There are, too, taxes on land and property, on fishing and pearling rights, and profits are even obtained from the sale (illegal and contrary to the treaties with the British Government, but still indulged in) of slave labour.

Apart from the pearling industry, one of the richest sources of income in Arabia is from the date plantations, and these, if not actually owned by the sheikhs, at least provide him with a handsome additional income. In recent years the Arab rulers have been considerably enriched by large sums paid for concessions by the oil

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

companies; this is quite distinct from the annual royalties received from oil-producing wells, which, in several cases, have made millionaires of the sheikhs. In the Trucial Oman Coast, the independent sheikhs are not only paid landing fees for each aircraft, but receive a substantial rental for the use of their lands as aerodromes and flying-boat alighting sites, including emergency landing places which are seldom, if ever, used. There is, in addition, a large amount of native labour employed by the British Government in the vicinity of camps and airfields, which gives an additional source of income to the sheikhs.

It is to be regretted that out of his large income the average sheikh contributes very little indeed to the welfare and enlightenment of his people. There are no schools to speak of, except in the larger sheikhdoms, such as Bahrein; roads are an unheard-of luxury; there is no system of sanitation, drainage, or water supply; graft and chicanery amongst the sheikh's ministers are rife, so that large profits are made by the ruling families and merchants out of the silver rupee exchange and, by a cunning system of cornering the markets in wheat and other essential produce, the people are frequently kept short of food or obliged to buy at exhorbitant prices. In other words, it suits the convenience and the pockets of the sheikhs to retain an ignorant and illiterate peasantry, living in conditions of extreme poverty and intolerable squalor.

Unfortunately the British Government, through its system of treaty-relations with the sheikhs, unwittingly fosters this undemocratic form of rule. Under the treaties, which give the British Government certain territorial and coastal rights and privileges, and protect the Arab chieftains against attack from a foreign power (though not, it is to be noted, against tribal wars), the rulers are encouraged to maintain a traditional form of government, and are advised by a British Resident, usually an Arab civil servant, and a Political Officer. The latter, who is appointed by the Indian Government, is usually an ex-officer of an Indian regiment. His principal duty is to ensure that the conditions of the treaties are observed, and to advise the sheikh on matters of state, so that friction does not arise between the throne and its subjects.

Politically and strategically, the Trucial coast is of extreme importance to the British Empire, and in maintaining a benevolent suzerainty over this territory we must, at the same time, keep within the bounds of international law. Thus, while we exercise no colonial or territorial rights over Oman, which is, legally speaking,

each packet containing pearls of the same class, but not necessarily of the same size—the ingenuity of the dealer finds further scope, for each of such packets, if skilfully made up, commands a higher price than the pearls comprising it would obtain if disposed of separately. Dealers are consequently averse from breaking up their packets and a fancy price must generally be paid for a single pearl selected from a packet of which the remainder are not taken.

The sheikhs of the Arab littoral derive considerable revenue from the pearl fisheries, but only as a means of taxes imposed on their subjects or on traders resident in their territories. The Trucial Oman sheikhs are also entitled to receive a share in the sale price of any pearl worth £50 or more which may have been found by one of their subjects, but no particular share is specified. The tax is called *Taraz*, and is sometimes assessed at the rate of one diver's share for each boat, and the sheikh is supposed to provide out of this revenue the services of watchmen to guard the towns and villages while the able-bodied males are absent. The *Taraz* is a poll tax on operatives and the *Nob*, also collected by the sheikhs, a tax on boats. Much confusion is caused by irregularity in collection of the taxes, the people always endeavouring to pay as little as possible and the sheikhs to take as much as they can, and that in advance. It is not surprising that the profession of tax-collector is highly unpopular in Arabia.

The rights of the pearl fisheries are very jealously guarded and the operatives are protected by the British Government. Only Arabs and the subjects of the sheikhs are allowed to undertake pearl diving in the Persian Gulf, and foreigners, diving suits, and any form of mechanical device are strictly barred. The effect of competition with Europeans furnished with scientific appliances and the use of deep-sea dredging, would tend to destroy the colonies from which the oysters upon the shallow beds accessible to native divers are recruited. Moreover, the appearance of European rivals would arouse great animosity on the part of the Arabs, who regard the fisheries as their common but exclusive inheritance, and for this reason alone the British Government has always opposed foreign entry—even that of British subjects—into the Gulf pearling industry.

In spite of Government opposition, however, the lure of the pearl trade has proved too great to prevent attempts by foreigners to compete in the industry, and several syndicates have been formed in the past with a view to exploiting the beds. Permission to